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Danger Builds Character

Why would otherwise sensible, caring parents encourage their children to engage in dangerous behaviors? Why would they even allow their children to put themselves into such danger? The idea of parents encouraging their children to endanger themselves may seem ludicrous, but Jeb Golinkin advises parents to do just that in his article, “Why Parents Should Let Their Kids Play Dangerous Sports.” The article first appeared on theweek.com, an online centrist current events and public interest magazine affiliated with *The Week* print magazine. *The Week* and theweek.com present balanced opinions in the news stories and editorials that they publish, appealing to a broad readership base. [At this point, for your essay, the rest of the summary should follow mentioning the type of claim, reasons in the article that supports the claim, counter arguments, responses to counter arguments, limits, etc. These don’t appear in this paper because they were not requirements of the assignment at this point].

While I found the topic of the article timely and interesting, the author failed to establish his ethos for writing such an article, demonstrated weak attempts at pathos, and presented underdeveloped logos.

Jeb Golinkin made little attempt to establish his credibility for writing “Why Parents Should Let Their Children Play Dangerous Sports.” I learned that Mr. Golinkin was a law student at the time he wrote this article. He was not a developmental psychologist, sociologist, or

medical researcher who had studied the effects of sports participation on a young person's physical, mental, or social development. Golinkin refers to the need of sports to help children develop spiritually, but he is not a clergyman or other qualified spiritual advisor, either. As a student, even a post-graduate student, he was unlikely to have been a parent at that time. He certainly gave no evidence that he was a parent speaking about his observations of his own children. Perhaps Golinkin was giving advice based on his own experiences of growing up in a sports-rich atmosphere. That would have given him at least some credibility with his audience. He made no claim, however, that he had ever participated in sports.

At best, Golinkin can cling to ethereal wisps of ethos in "Why Parents..." Golinkin writes with an air of confidence and intelligence. A reader might feel at least some confidence in Mr. Golinkin's writing based solely on the author's self-confidence. Golinkin also establishes some credibility in demonstrating that he has considered both sides of the argument. For example, he quotes Barack Obama, who said, "If I had a son, I'd have to think long and hard before I let him play football" (Golinkin, 530). Golinkin then goes on to say, "I respect the president's comments... But I also think it is a shame that people would not allow their children to play football" (530). The author's consideration of and concession of respect for an opposing argument add an element of credibility to his writing. These small instances of ethos would have had a stronger impact if the author had firmly established his credibility earlier in the writing. Unfortunately, these details alone fail to convince me that Golinkin has any authority on this topic.

Golinkin strengthened his arguments with calculated appeals to pathos, but even these fell short of what he needed to persuade his audience. He was on the right track with his calm,

calculated approach to pathos. He elicited images of children playing and growing that should allay some of the fears parents might feel about their children participating in activities that could result in injury. He reminds parents that “sports... continue to represent something noble about the human spirit” (Golinkin 530). Such uplifting comments lessen the reader’s fears. The author also appeals to parents’ desire to nurture their children through sports and reminds readers that “spiritual development is every bit as important as physical safety” (Golinkin 530). The author’s discussion tries to replace feelings of fear with feelings of calm acceptance. These emotional appeals might have had more impact if the author had not spent the first third of the article describing a violent scene from the movie *Gladiator* and discussing, somewhat graphically, the sports-related deaths of two high-profile athletes. Golinkin sunk his own ship before he even set sail by doing this. Even without the references to violence at the beginning of the article, Golinkin’s attempts to calm and uplift his readers were a little weak. I would have been more persuaded by stronger emotional pulls.

Although insufficiently supported, I found Golinkin’s use of logos to be the strongest and most persuasive aspect of the article. Golinkin implored the reader to recall that children need something other than personal safety to prepare them to face the challenges of adulthood. He makes both emotional and logical pleas when he states, “our collective obsession with protecting our children from harm threatens to turn out a generation of children ill-equipped... to deal with the brave new world order in which only the tough and the persistent will thrive” (Golinkin 530). He argues that participation in sports teaches children “the importance of teamwork, sportsmanship, toughness, and competitiveness,” including how “to strive, to succeed, and most importantly, how to fail” (Golinkin 530), in short, the skills children will need

to become healthy, functional adults in society. Golinkin's main argument follows this syllogism: "Only the tough and the persistent will thrive" (Golinkin 530) in the world (major premise); Sports teach children to be tough (minor premise); therefore, children should play sports (conclusion). There is some logic to the argument, but the syllogism has two major fallacies. Golinkin's logic falls down a slippery slope. He gives the impression that only sports can prepare children for life, that people who do not participate in sports as children will be unable to function as adults. He also creates an ad populum fallacy by implying that the reader should agree with him because he and the reader share similar values. Both care about children. Both want to see today's children prosper in the future. Therefore, the reader should reach the same conclusion as he has. Golinkin fails to offer enough evidence to support his claims.

The ethos, pathos, and logos Golinkin employed in his theweek.com article failed to convince me to heed his advice. He mostly set the right tone with his use of fear-allying pathos, and his logic seemed reasonably sound, but both were insufficient to persuade me. He failed most notably in his inability to prove that he had the authority to write on this subject. I liked the points Golinkin made in the article. Now I would like to know if an expert in a relevant field agrees with him.

Work Cited

Golinkin, Jeb. "Why Parents Should Let Their Kids Play Dangerous Sports." *Elements of Argument*. Annette T. Rottenberg and Donna Haisty Winchell. 12th Edition. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018. pp. 529-530.